



**COMMITTEE TITLE: Clean & Green Committee**

**DATE: 26 June 2023**

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| <b>REPORT TITLE:</b> | Re-Wilding Parks & Verges                                 |
| <b>REPORT OF:</b>    | Adam Aldridge, Corporate Manager – Green Spaces (interim) |

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

The report sets out the initial proposal to consider relaxing the mowing upon specific verges and open spaces, with a view to returning to the Committee with a more detailed report setting out management options.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Over the past decade, land managers have widely embraced the concept of relaxing mowed areas to promote biodiversity. Research findings consistently indicate that allowing grass and wildflowers to grow longer in these designated areas contributes positively to various environmental aspects. Not only does it enhance carbon absorption, but it also aids in reducing pollution levels and has a significant beneficial effect on wildlife.

Further, by relaxing the mowing regime in targeted areas that maximise wildlife benefit, resource will be freed up to allow additional cuts of more formal amenity areas and parks.

Brentwood Borough Council does not currently have recorded identified areas or a policy dedicated to rewilding, however the implementation of these naturalised areas could be achieved relatively simply.

The first steps will be for officers to identify suitable sites for consideration, where benefits to wildlife will be the greatest, and outline management options for those given areas whereby a 'wilder' approach to maintenance is taken. This list of sites will be presented within the body of a report to this Committee for consideration, later in this municipal year.

The report will also consider the practical implications of altering the grounds maintenance regime, and how these changes are perceived by residents and the

users of the Borough's Open Spaces. The impact of, and communication to park users these changes will be a key element of any finalised plans.

### **Alternative to No Mow areas**

#### **Natural Regeneration within Green Spaces**

Natural regeneration, the process by which woodlands naturally establish and regenerate without human intervention, offers significant benefits within Brentwood and promotes ecological resilience and biodiversity.

Natural regeneration allows for the establishment of diverse and healthy ecosystems by enabling native tree species to regenerate and thrive. The absence of human intervention allows for a more natural selection process which leads to the development of diverse and resilient woodland areas that can better withstand diseases, pests, and climate change impacts. Natural regeneration also provides opportunities for the re-establishment of native flora and fauna, creating vital habitats for a wide range of species.

Natural regeneration is cost-effective and sustainable. Unlike artificial planting methods, which require significant resources, natural regeneration relies on the inherent regenerative capacity of the land. It reduces the need for manual tree planting and associated costs, such as whips, labour, and maintenance.

#### **Creation of Woodland within Green Spaces**

Woodland planting using whips offers numerous benefits for both the environment and society. Firstly, it plays a crucial role in mitigating climate change. Woodlands act as carbon sinks, absorbing and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By planting whips, which are young, flexible tree seedlings, landowners can establish new woodlands and enhance existing ones. As these trees grow, they continue to capture carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help to combat global warming.

Secondly, woodland planting provides essential habitats for wildlife. Whips planted in woodlands create a diverse ecosystem that supports a wide range of flora and fauna. Trees offer nesting sites and shelter for birds, mammals, and insects, while the undergrowth provides cover and food for smaller creatures. Planting native species promotes biodiversity, as these trees have evolved to support local wildlife.

Woodland habitats also contribute to the preservation of endangered and threatened species, acting as important corridors for their movement and dispersal. Planting whips contributes to the conservation of the UK's natural heritage and helps protect vulnerable ecosystems.

## **Planting of Wildflower Meadows**

Planting wildflowers in our borough can bring about several ecological benefits. Wildflowers contribute to increased biodiversity and provide valuable habitats for pollinators and other wildlife. The colourful blooms attract a wide range of bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects, supporting their populations and promoting pollination.

Wildflowers also provide food sources and shelter for birds, small mammals, and other wildlife, creating a thriving and diverse ecosystem within the clay soil habitat. Planting wildflowers in clay soil can help improve soil health and reduce erosion. The deep-rooted nature of many wildflower species helps to break up compacted clay soil, improving its structure and drainage. The extensive root systems also stabilize the soil, reducing the risk of erosion and runoff. As the wildflowers establish and grow, they contribute organic matter to the soil through fallen leaves and decaying plant material, enriching the soil and supporting its long-term fertility. It should be noted that there is a significant cost to implementing and maintaining these areas.

### **What are Neighbouring Authorities doing?**

1. Rochford District Council: The Council has launched its Parks for Nature initiative which is currently in its second year of establishment. This project aims to create a balance between recreation and wildlife and has involved the creation of naturalised woodlands, meadow and conservation areas within green spaces and active tree planting projects in partnership with Essex County Council and the Woodland Trust.
2. Essex County Council: The council has initiated several projects to promote meadow and woodland creation across the county. For example, they have established the Essex Biodiversity Project, which aims to enhance and create new meadow habitats. They also provide guidance and resources to landowners and communities interested in creating woodlands through initiatives like the Essex Community Tree Planting Scheme.
3. Basildon Borough Council: The council has been involved in various meadow creation initiatives. They have designated specific areas as Local Wildlife Sites, where meadows are protected and managed to promote biodiversity. Basildon Borough Council has also partnered with local community groups to establish wildflower meadows in public spaces, contributing to pollinator-friendly habitats.
4. Chelmsford City Council: The council has implemented meadow creation programs as part of their commitment to enhancing biodiversity. They have transformed unused land into wildflower meadows and actively manage them to support pollinators. Chelmsford City Council also provides guidance and

resources to residents interested in creating their own wildflower meadows or small woodlands on private land.

5. Colchester Borough Council: The council has prioritized woodland creation and restoration projects. They have established community woodlands and actively manage them to enhance biodiversity and provide recreational opportunities for residents. Colchester Borough Council also collaborates with local organizations to create meadows in urban areas, promoting green spaces and supporting pollinators.
6. Tendring District Council: The council has launched initiatives to promote meadow and woodland creation within the district. They work with landowners and local communities to identify suitable sites for meadow establishment and provide support and guidance throughout the process. Tendring District Council also actively manages woodlands to improve their ecological value and public accessibility.

## **2.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer**  
**Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

None at this stage.

## **3.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Joint Acting Director People & Governance & Monitoring Officer**  
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Any work undertaken by the Council, either by itself or in partnership will be in line with statutory legal guidance.

## **4.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

### **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

None, the report is currently, effectively setting out the scope of the proposed project.

### **6.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

Consultation with relevant stakeholders will be considered as set-out in the report to follow.

## **7.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health**  
**Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on anybody with a protected characteristic.

## **8.0 ECONOMIC AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Phil Drane, Director - Place**

**Tel & Email 01277 312500 / phil.drane@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

There are no direct economic implications. More generally, the upkeep of a clean and pleasant environment in the borough positively contributes to the local economy.

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### **APPENDICES**

None

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

None